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Many Drugs : Few Remedies.

BY



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of the Author.

MANY DRUGS : FEW REMEDIES.

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Diseases are the same, but the armament of the physician has increased ten thousand-fold. Hippocrates with a few remedies and a wide and practical observation of the laws of health, wrested medicine from the domain of sorcery, and made it to shine as an art, and himself as a demi-god in the eyes of men ; but the modern physician in his multitudinous drugs finds few remedies, and the tragedy of death is played all around him as he stalks behind the scenes. It is the boast of the profession that the death-rate is less and the average of human life is greater, but I might be pardoned the query if we have given due weight to other irresistible influences abroad. Exchange of commodities, increase of wealth, desire of luxury, culture of travel—all these have waved the magic wand over the penury of the past. The barber is better housed than ancient kings ; the very char-women have finery their daughters knew not of. The elements no longer beat upon and disintegrate the wandering populations of the world. Every war has been a civilizer. Races have amalgamated, languages have blended, the hordes of the barbarians are the thriving citizens of to-day. Cities shine thick about the earth : the ocean is but a highway. Small wonder is it, then, that famine and pestilence are held at bay ; that the fine little chemic teeth of the air and the mists no longer gnaw the vitals of whole multitudes ! Did medicine exorcise

the demon, or did comfortable warmth and food, new thoughts, wider horizons?

The schools increase, the graduates swarm, the books emerge through printer's ink like bubbles on Avernus, but how many great physicians can you name, and which are the diseases borne under by the annual spring-flood of doctors! And yet where is the young doctor who does not believe in the magic of drugs, and the old doctor, if he be a wise man, who does not look upon the most of them as mischievous, and the minority as deserving of restriction? The pathologist is skeptical of them all.

With laborious zeal we study diseases. The magnificent eye of the microscope dilates above the smallest speck and gives it a local habitation and a name; we anatomize and compare, and the professor awes with learned length while he discourses of the ills he cannot cure. Cripps tells us the death-rate from cancer has shown a pretty steady relative increase in England during the whole period of which we have any accurate returns, averaging about 1 in 56 of all the deaths that occur; and comparing the death-rate with the number of persons living, there is an annual average of 1 death from cancer in every 2,860. Comparison with the statistics of deaths from the reports of the Board of Health of New Jersey, during 1879 to 1883, inclusive, shows an average death-rate from cancer of 1 in about 51 of all the deaths that occur, and annually, taking the census of 1880, of 1 in every 2,675 living. Are we any nearer to the cure of malarial diseases? Although it might justly be urged that what is frequently called malaria is not malaria at all, and that where the ignorant or the indolent doctor of old, mildly puzzled by a disease relegated the cause to the liver and prescribed a mercurial, his son or his grandson, more glibly fashionable, ascribes all to malaria, prescribes quinine, and goes his way. Yet I am speaking of the veritable miasms; those that rise from unhallowed places, and, tangled in the veins, debauch the system and lower its *morale*. And do we, waiting

behind the eye of Koch, know anything of tuberculosis, or believe that he does? Does not the ravage go on? And who has won eminence in curing yellow fever? Are men no longer in dread of the cholera? And the exanthemata—does not the grawsome pendulum of disease sweep into and out of every neighborhood, about once in five years? Who cures rheumatism, or typhoid fever, or chronic Bright's disease? And where is the stout heart that never failed before a patient burning and broiling in the horrible slow flame of pyæmia? And yet who refrains from prescribing? The witches move one way about the cauldron, and we go the other; they throw in the drugs that brew the poison, and we throw in the counter-poisons. Stille and Maisch's Dispensatory has a list of one hundred and fifty remedies for rheumatism, a disease which is as likely to become chronic with treatment as without it. Everybody has a specific, from your grandaunt with teas, fomentations, and flannel, to the last German doctor with his forty grains of salicylic acid to the dose. The extremes of treatment are one-and-thirty days, and relapses as frequently occur with the acid as without it, and the heart frequently becomes affected when the system is saturated with the drug. No specific this, surely.

And then, as to typhoid fever, rarely exists a physician nowadays who does not feel called upon to reduce the temperature, though why, it would be hard for him to tell. Struggles the system against the fever with the ferocious strength of a man at bay in battle; oscillates every little cell with the glowing heat; by every avenue nature seeks to expel the invader. Suddenly an appalling dose of quinine paralyzes the fever and the patient as well. Almost gleefully the physician reads the figures on his clinical thermometer: the tempature has fallen four degrees! but the patient does not rally. He lies dazed in a stupor for hours, when the blood begins its ebullitions, the frenzy is renewed, the fever has asserted itself once more. Again is quinine heroically

given, "as if disease lay in its phenomena and not in the organic condition out of which they spring." It is the same old officious zeal that must be doing something, not remembering Milton's famous line,

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

The trouble is, medical thought runs too much toward specifics. It is the fashion of the time to achieve sudden honors, sudden wealth, easy learning, and why not rapid restorations to health? The journals teem with fortunate prescriptions, the nostrums of manufacturing chemists push braggart charlatanism to the wall. Our Pharmacopœia has but barely escaped from the jumbled theriacs of old times when these monstrosities appear. Montaigne and some of his friends, all suffering from calculous disease, while comforted with each other's miseries, made merry over a new pill of a hundred ingredients, lately devised to cure their complaint. The antidote of Mithridates contained fifty-four ingredients and the theriac of Andromachus sixty. Warburg's tincture has about twenty, and on the outskirts of every medical journal are flaunted the nostrums for the cure of this, or that, or twenty diseases; and, most painful to relate, there is always appended the name of some professor in a medical college to laud the mixture. But the medical colleges are all over the land like mushrooms, and the professors are thicker than blackberries. There may be knowledge enough to go around, but there are few heads strong enough to take it undiluted. Books of prescriptions are issued from the press. Medicine is taught in twelve easy lessons. The average doctor has but to guess at the disease when the ready-made prescription is at his hand, or the thought-relieving elixir fills the momentary need. Even while he feels the patient's pulse or asks his preliminary questions, his mind is abstractedly saying, "Now what shall I give this man?" His faith is in his fetish, and never in him-

self. He must make a show of doing something or his rival will outvie him in public esteem.

Not that such as he control medical thought or shape its destiny, but they do tincture its present most wofully. Between the noblest who stand awe-struck on the threshold of their art and science, seeing the throng of life majestical in its energy, reliant and undismayed, from the nowhere to the infinite pushing without repose, down to the lowest camp-follower in medicine who drives a sutler's trade, there is such a height and depth that the average is without compliment to any. The first recognize the divinity in man, the spark glimmering through the mystery of life ; know of the long march and the myriads of years yet to be trodden under, of the foes without and the hereditary diseases within, and with cautious skill endeavor to relieve, assist and guard the confiding one. But the latter looks to the spoils and the esteem of the hour, and frequently brings the ill into a worse chancery than that legal court which mumbles a man's real estate till the last acre crumbles from his title-deed.

And yet from of old it has been so long the honored custom to dose each luckless patient, that we have trained them and ourselves to expect it, and even the wisest physician feels somewhat criminal if he withholds his hand. The fact is, we, for all our boasted learning, stand too much in awe of precedent, and are too little cognizant of the natural history of disease. But when, as in cholera, a thousand drugs have been given without avail, while in some other disease recovery has been the rule under medicines diverse and incompatible, philosophy may well hold both her sides, and marvel that we preserve our grave demeanors. If homœopathy has done any good, it has been in enforcing the doctrine of the tendency of most diseases to remedy themselves. It was a long step in advance when Dr. Pauvini, of Naples, in 1834, to make undisputed trial of homœopathic medicines, in the Hospital della Place, set apart ten patients who were not allowed to take any

treatment at all, while ten others with similar diseases were subjected to the frivolities of this sect. All recovered.

If more ancient proof of the tendency of natural recovery were wanted, we should not lack in the wonderful cases which have come down to us, by drugs which present enlightenment has shown to have no remedial virtues whatever. For generations the Chinese have imported ginseng for its weight in specie, believing it to be an infallible specific for a hundred ills, while we know it has not the virtue of common water. And yet some marvellous cures must have taken place while under treatment with this drug, or its reputation would have long since tarnished.

What sad commentary does the reading of old therapeutics furnish upon much of credulous modern treatment. The decadence of once popular remedies must lead us to suspect the disappearance of many which are now highly esteemed. The extravagant and almost universal application of some drugs, as quinine, for instance, must eventually bring about a curtailment of their uses; but what will contribute more than anything else is the proper understanding of their physiological effects.

If I were to characterize the present tendency of medical minds, it would be the almost universal belief that the great majority of diseases are caused by the loss of tonicity, and must be treated by tonics and stimulants. As if the overwrought mind or body must be speedily thrust back to its tension and kept to the delerious strain and tendency of the age. To this end a large body of pioneers, most attracted by lucre, a few by fame, are everywhere experimenting, or pretending to experiment, and seeking to demonstrate the miraculous utility of new drugs or recent compounds in the cure of the most diverse and lingering diseases; scarcely a chemist at his lurid flames, disintegrating or combining, discovers a rare crystal or a potent liquor, into which all things at some expansion will dissolve, but he begins to ex-

periment with it on plants and animals, with a view while it is yet crudely known, of heralding it as a specific for a score of human ills. If they threw physic to the dogs only, we might commiserate the unfortunate brutes; but when we think of the human, everywhere, down whose unsuspecting throats the vandal dose must go, we may well shrink aghast at the unrecorded mischief that is done.

We hear of the so-called cures, where we might shrewdly suspect nature would have remedied herself if let alone, but rarely do we hear of the failures. Where one physician is honest enough to publish the latter, a thousand will say nothing about it. It is positively painful to read the ill-digested reports of practitioners which sometimes reach us. The most unconquerable diseases are found to have been cured by the most unreasonable medicines. The most unscientific writer has had no difficulty in subduing phthisis, diphtheria, albuminuria, or typhus fever with drugs that you and I have found no virtue in. Where you and I have failed, he has always cured about fifty cases. His easy-going optimism is scarcely content with less. But what are the means? As to the drugs, most of them are poisons. Solutions of the majority poured about the roots of plants destroy their vitality, and given to animals full often the horrid corroding torture begins that death cannot too speedily end. Given to men, corresponding effects are usually produced, if carried to extreme. But forecasting the result in man from those produced in the lower animals is frequently an argument both fallacious and dangerous. The chemical action of the digestion in brutes would seem to be gross compared to that of man. Not seldom the toxic properties of plants are expelled undetected through the kidneys of the former, which would be speedily fatal to the finer human organization. As, for instance, birds and herbivorous animals eat the fruit of the belladonna without injury, the latter excreting the active principle with the urine. Two or three grains of atropia may be injected hypoder-

mically in pigeons and dogs without causing more than a few hours' indisposition. Birds will tolerate the presence of morphia in the stomach to an almost incredible degree. A dog, says Stille, has recovered from a dose of six grains of acetate of morphia.

While, on the other hand, where men find no evil result in certain drugs, brutes will rapidly succumb to unexpected toxic effects. Thus, citric and tartaric acids, camphor, coccus, and dulcamara are fatal to most of the lower animals usually experimented on, destroying them with pain and violence. Thomas injected milk into human veins, and saved his patients from death by hemorrhage. Howe performed the same experiments on dogs, and all the animals died. And oil of thyme, acetate of ammonia, and potassii iodidum act fatally on the lower animals, while they are fairly medicinal to men.

Besides the illustrations given there are many other drugs which act so diversely on different animals that no judgment as to even their probable action on man can in any way be gained. Falk and Guenste administered berberina hypodermically to rabbits without observing any uniform effect, and tried with many animals such drugs as colocynth, cyclamen, eucalyptus, hyoscyamus, and strychnia, and some others, which presented the most curious antagonisms, some slaying outright, some sickening grievously, and leaving others entirely unharmed.

Added to the cloudy comprehension of these might be adduced the uncertainty of the action of drugs which have been habitually prescribed for centuries. Calomel, so long used with superabundant faith as a cholagogue, though occasionally disputed, is at last believed to have no such effect, but to actually diminish the secretion of bile. Who does not remember when sarsaparilla was thought so potent, though now so unregarded. And it has been no long time since antimony was restricted, when before it had been of universal application.

Even to be liberal in a large sense, if certain drugs like opium, quinine, iodine, phosphorus, iron,

ether, strychnia, and aconite were rescued, the whole nauseous bulk of the rest might be in the flat seas sunk, and the death-rate rise no higher. Medicine has achieved her most glorious renown in the prevention, not in the cure of disease; and in that domain lies her imperishable reward.

In dealing with the fortunes of a spirit so subtle and elusive as life, we should accept nothing as proven that has not stood the inquisitorial tests of time and innumerable applications. Lands and governments remain for the future craft of men; but life, that fades from before us to-day, no to-morrow shall reillumine. Our art deals at once with all that is vital in the stupendous mysteries that surround us. Moulded of all the elements; hot, glowing from the forge, the wonder and the paragon of nature—is the exquisite sense at fault, the body languishing? Would we remedy it, we must be quick about it. And to be of seemly haste we must be convinced of the qualities and applicability of the medicines we are about to use. But how shall we be convinced? Certainly not through druggists' circulars, nor through the unfreighted enthusiasm of a few professors; but if a carefully tabulated return of disease treated and remedies used could be annually made from every physician to a responsible board of supervisors, who, in their turn, should sift and digest with rigorous criticism the mass of evidence before them, and report back again to the profession at large, progressive knowledge could be maintained and the past made secure. As it is, we have no system; each works upon his own plan; our therapeutics is involved and nebulous. The power that comes from thorough organization is squandered in individual groping.

There is no reason why medicine should not work toward a great end by machinery similar to a political government, provided you can make each physician responsible to all, and exact his best endeavors. There is one other way—the establishment of a college of experimental medicine, as recom-



mended by Milton, with a system of registration for correcting errors of observation.

But it is no part of my present plan to provide for this. Could physicians be brought to realize, after all the advantages they have derived from other branches of their art, how faulty is their therapeutics, the remedy for even this evil would come in time. For happily medicine, of all the sciences, is the most democratic. While in the gross it has descended a vast system with a definite object, within all is commotion. No method of practice is stable because of its antiquity. ^a No teacher is long an oracle. No genius can compass what the next generation will pursue. New forms, new processes, new affinities constantly arise, dissolve, renew themselves, are leavened with the old, and, in time, leaven the thought of the morrow.

